

## Two teachers, two classes, one room

We are two kindergarten teachers who share a room. Colleen's morning students come to school from 8:00 to 11:30 AM Monday - Friday. Ann's afternoon students come to school 11:00 (for lunch) and to class from 11:30 AM to 3:00 PM on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. On Thursday, there is an overlap of the two classes, and the afternoon class comes to school at 10:00 AM and is dismissed at 2:00 PM.

We have organized our room and our schedule to make our partnership really work and we'd like to share with you how we've done it. Some of these strategies seem so simple. Others really take some thinking and organization. We hope readers will be able to find practical and comfortable ways to meet the challenges posed in times of reduced class size, with more classes and less classroom space.

In late August when we began getting our classroom ready, we decided to really look carefully at how we stored and organized our materials. We took everything out of all of the cupboards. This was a real physical, as well as organizational, challenge! In addition to the sorting process, we had numerous conversations over several days about the merits of our various materials. We used this opportunity to get rid of things we hadn't used in several years. If teachers do nothing else, this one type of activity is something we highly recommend. We put our materials together by topic, rather than by owner. No longer were there Colleen's favorite October activities and Ann's box of fall materials. We were enhancing what we had and this helped our concept of "team". Our rhyming books and charts went in one pile, another pile was created for pattern tasks, another for the classroom "store", and so on. As a result, we both now know where things are in the room and we both also know what materials we have to work with. When a colleague asks to borrow a particular item, we laugh to ourselves as we respond cheerfully, "We know exactly where that is!" We are organized! We are empowered!

We have one desk. It has shared office supplies, and materials. We put our two plan books on the top of that desk. There is a file drawer with school schedules, office procedures, sub plans, and other school business. We both use these files. Right next to the desk is a two drawer cabinet with hanging portfolio files. The AM class is in one drawer, the PM class is in the other drawer. At the front of each drawer is a record keeping file for assignments, student lists and other class information. We use these file drawers daily.

We still have our own big personal file cabinets, and we're using them in several ways. We've placed them back to back as a room divider/island. One side of the two cabinets is our magnet center where we create weekly graphing questions and use magnetic name slips for student responses. The other side forms a partition and, with pillows, has become a cozy reading nook which is perpendicular to a student bookcase.

We've had long conversations about things that are important to us. Just think about the calendar, for example! How could we have meaningful daily calendar activities without having to create two calendars? To keep things simple and less time consuming, we decided that we didn't want to make "doubles" of things. So our calendar has several parallel features.

We keep track of the days in school in several ways. We put one drinking straw in a bag each day. On the tenth day we make a bundle with a rubber band and put the bundle in the tens bag. We also put a penny in another coin bag each day. On the tenth

day we exchange the ten pennies for a dime. One month Colleen's class does the straws and Ann's class is in charge of the pennies. The next month we switch.

We also have a number line on adding machine tape across the front of the room for the days in school. Each day another number is written in marker on the number line. We keep track of the day in school on a pocket 100's chart, too. Each day another number on the pocket chart is revealed. One month Colleen's class is responsible for the adding machine tape number line while Ann's class does the pocket chart. The next month we switch.

We keep track of the weather in two ways, also. We have little weather pictures for a push pin bar graph of the weather and we have rubber stamps for the calendar numbers. One month while one class responds to the weather information by stamping the calendar number slips, the other class makes a bar graph display. The next month we switch.

We plan each week around a framework of events. We have three important language arts activities that are keyed to our reading program. We use a rotation system so that each child has worked with each activity by the end of the three day rotation. Each block of time lasts approximately 45 minutes. We use a pocket chart with names for each of the three groups. At the end of the activity period, the morning teacher pulls the names off the chart and positions them for the next day (group 1 will go to 2 tomorrow, 2 will go to 3 tomorrow, and 3 will go to 1 tomorrow). At the same time, the names for the afternoon group rotations are set in place. The same process is repeated in the afternoon.

We have one cooking activity each week because we believe our students need to have these experiences and school may be the only place where that might happen. By committing ourselves to one each week we are sure to provide them. Our parent community is beginning to be appreciative of our efforts and helps us with ingredients. We post a sign up sheet specifying what ingredients we need for the upcoming cooking activity. This method is quite effective and lets us know which ingredients we still need on cooking day.

We plan for one important arts and crafts activity each week. This is usually a "messy" activity. We realize that activities like finger painting, sponge painting, white glue and found object collages, etc. are very important for the motor development and creative expression of our students, yet are often not happening in homes and classrooms because no one wants to deal with the mess. By committing ourselves to one per week, and knowing that it is in a particular slot, we seem to feel less stress over that "mess".

We value communication with parents and have created a system for a weekly newsletter that we send out to both classes. It is possible because we have a computer on our desk and, with ready access, we can write it as we go. Our newsletter has a framework with sections devoted to descriptions of our reading/language arts activity for the week, our weekly poem, an announcement of next week's cooking project, progress in our garden, our math tub activities, the results of our weekly graph or question, and so on. Both of us add to the news of the week during the day when we've got a few moments. By Thursday afternoon, the news is almost complete and ready to be printed. *Voices from the morning class* is a feature that is included at the end of the news for parents of the AM class. *Voices from the afternoon class* is added for the parents of the PM class. These snippets of conversation are taken down on large chart paper at the close of activity periods and at the end of the day. They are also typed into the computer on a regular basis so the work doesn't pile up. (We have provided an email address so readers could obtain a copy of our news if they wish).

At the core of our partnership are shared beliefs about how children learn, and knowing that we need to support each other if we are going to accomplish what we want to do. We both decided that if one of us felt that the other partner was doing something that was making us uncomfortable, we would find a time to sit down and talk. We realized at the beginning of the year that we are really counting on each other to do our important and shared work. We need each other. We have to have mutual respect and trust. The more these commitments are in place, the better it gets.

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